

Message Text

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PAGE 01 MONTRE 00484 102208Z
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 156

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MONTREAL 0484

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, CA

SUBJECT: ANOTHER RUMOR OF SNAP PROVINCIAL ELECTION

REF: MONTREAL 468, MONTREAL 381

1. ANDRE AUDET, CHIEF FUND RAISER FOR UNION NATIONALE (UN),
TOLD ME YESTERDAY THAT RODRIGUE BIRON, UN LEADER, EXPECTS A
PROVINCIAL ELECTION IN LIEU OF A REFERENDUM NEXT SPRING.

2. QUERIED ABOUT PROBABLE LOSS OF FACE THIS WOULD CAUSE,
GIVEN HEAVY INVESTMENT BY PARTI QUEBECOIS IN REFERENDUM
CONCEPT, HE STATED "THEY WILL SIMPLY NOT BE ABLE TO GOVERN
ANY LONGER. NEED FOR A STRONGER MANDATE WILL BE THE BASIS
AND IT WILL BE REAL. LOOK AT THE LABOR SITUATION, FOR
INSTANCE. WHOEVER HEARD OF A LABOR MINISTER SAYING AND
MEANING THAT HE WILL PUT STRIKERS IN JAIL? BUT THAT'S WHAT
PIERRE-MARC JOHNSON IS DOING."

3. WHEN TOLD I HAD HEARD SPECULATION ABOUT A SNAP ELECTION
IN THE FALL, HE INSISTED THAT WAS "TOO SOON" AND APPARENTLY
WAS REFLECTING NOT ONLY HIS OWN BUT BIRON'S THINKING.

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PAGE 02 MONTRE 00484 102208Z

4. AS IN PREVIOUS DISCUSSIONS ON SUBJECT (REFTELS), REASONING
SEEMS SOMEWHAT FUZZY. NONTHELESS, AS IN CASE OF DESROCHERS,
SOURCE HAS BEEN IN POLITICAL GAME A LONG TIME (SPECIAL
ASSISTANT - CHEF DU CABINET -- TO FINANCE MINISTER IN JOHNSON
ADMINISTRATION), AND NOT LIKELY ACCEPT VIEWS OF NEOPHYTE LIKE
BIRON UNLESS HIS OWN POLITICAL ANTENNAE ARE PICKING UP SAME

REVERBERATIONS.

5. AUDET ALSO MEMBER OF PETITION-GATHERING ANTI-REFERENDUM GROUP WHICH, HE SAID, WOULD GO ON ITS THIRTY-DAY BLITZ "IN LATE APRIL OR THE MONTH OF MAY UNLESS A FEDERAL ELECTION IS CALLED. IN LATTER CASE, IT WILL BE POSTPONED SIX MONTHS." COMMENT: IF SIGNS GREW OF SNAP FALL ELECTION, PERIOD OF POSTPONEMENT WOULD APPARENTLY BE SHORTENED.

6. HE EXPRESSED SERIOUS MISGIVINGS ABOUT LIBERALS CHOOSING RYAN TO LEAD PARTY. "ALL THREE LEADERS WULD THEN BE CUT FROM THE SAME CLOTH. PEOPLE TALK ABOUT THEIR DIFFERENCES BUT THEY HAVE A LOT MORE IN COMMON THAN IS GENERALLY RECOGNIZED."

7. RE THE MOST RECENT POLL (MONTREAL'S 463), AUDET CLAIMED THAT ABOUT 50 PERCENT OF THE LIBERAL INCREASE WAS FRANCOPHONE, CONTRARY TO LEVESQUE STATEMENT THAT IT REFLECTED THE RETURN OF ANGLOS TO THE FOLD.

8. TAKING A LONGER VIEW, HE FEELS THE APPROXIMATELY 20 PERCENT HARD-CORE INDEPENDENTISTS DO NOT REPEAT NOT REPRESENT A CONTINUING-FOREVER THREAT OF UNREST. "WHEN THE CAUSE OF FRENCH CANADIAN MALAISE (WOUNDED PRIDE, ECONOMIC INEQUALITY AND SENSE OF DISCRIMINATION, ETC.) IS GONE -- AND IT IS CERTAINLY DISSIPATING -- THE MOVEMENT WILL DIE OUT." HE SEES MARC JOHNSON RAPIDLY APPROACHING STATURE OF SECOND STRONGEST
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PAGE 03 MONTRE 00484 102208Z

LEADER IN GOVERNMENT "PROVIDED HE SURVIVES. PORTFOLIO MAY NOT REALLY BE ELECTRIC CHAIR BUT AS BEST IT HAS SWORD OF DAMOCLES HANGING OVER IT."

9. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH AUDET DID NOT MENTION FISCAL PROBLEMS OF GOVERNMENT, HIS GENERAL ARGUMENT (PARA TWO) WAS NOT TOO DISSIMILAR TO THAT OF DESROCHERS. UNDERLYING THESIS OF EACH IS SOCIAL-CUM-PARTY DISCORD. THERE ARE SIGNS OF BOTH, BUT TIME FRAME AND EXTENT TO WHICH THIS CAN SAP ABILITY OF GOVERNMENT TO SURVIE STILL ARGUABLE IN OUR VIEW.
HARPER

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